

# News Release



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## NEW REPORT SHOWS HUGE INCREASE IN OFF-ROAD RECREATION

**SACRAMENTO** – Registrations of all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, dune buggies, sand rails and dirt bikes in California have more than doubled in the last 20 years, according to new report examining the challenges facing California's off-highway vehicle recreation program, the largest of its kind in the nation.

The report found that in addition to the 108 percent increase in the OHV green sticker registrations since 1980, there has been a 74 percent increase in street-licensed four-wheel drive vehicles in California since 1994. In the last six years alone there has been more than a 60 percent increase in the sale of sports utility vehicles in the state, according to the report, "Taking the High Road: The Future of California's Off-Highway Recreation Program."

While off-highway vehicle use is growing in popularity, the amount of available acreage for the sport has been shrinking, the report found. Since 1980, there has been a 48 percent decrease in acreage available for OHV recreation in the California Desert, for instance.

"These factors present us with a profound challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century," said California State Parks Deputy Director David L. Widell, who oversees the department's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

"Our goal as outlined in this report is to establish procedures that will provide for a long and healthy future for OHV recreation in California, while protecting our natural resources," Widell said. "We must maintain the roots of this popular sport, yet be responsive to the concerns of a population that is rapidly expanding into California's available spaces. Toward that end, there is a constant vigilance to provide for managed recreation while maintaining the integrity of the land."

This report specifies for the first time in the 30-year history of the OHV program the challenges and solutions this special form of recreation faces today and in the years to come.

"California's off-highway vehicle recreation program is the largest of its type in the United States," Widell said. "Taking the High Road" reflects our commitment at State Parks to assess our present programs and initiate the process of openly charting our future course."

Widell said the Division continues to work diligently to correct mistakes of the past and responsibly manage existing off-highway vehicle areas, but the challenge is growing – there has been a 52 percent increase in visitors to State Vehicular Recreation Areas since 1985. And, SNO-PARKS, which attracted 190,000 visitors in the 1992-93 fiscal year, received more than 415,000 visitors in the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

SVRAs are off-highway vehicle parks, encompassing a total of more than 90,000 acres in California. Most offer restrooms, camping, shade ramadas and RV dump stations. Many of the SVRAs have dedicated vast tracks of land as off-limits to motorized use. There are six main SVRAs in the state.

The SNO-PARK program started in 1984 in response to requests by the public for plowed parking areas where people could safely park to recreate in the snow. There are 21 SNO-PARKS in California.

“Taking the High Road” took two years to complete, and was paid entirely by user-generated Off-Highway Vehicle Trust Fund revenue.

The Division has implemented the following initiatives that are described in greater detail throughout the NEW publication:

- **Encourage and Expand Stakeholder Involvement.**

One of the most nationally innovative approaches of its kind in dealing with increasingly controversial off-highway recreation issues was the formation in May 2000 of the more than 50-member Stakeholders Roundtable.

The stakeholders involved in off-highway recreation are diverse. In general, they consist of OHV and non-motorized recreation enthusiasts, environmental organizations, private property owners, public land management agencies, law enforcement agencies, local communities, businesses, and local governments.

- **New Fuel Tax Study**

Stakeholders have raised many issues related to the OHV program’s fuel tax income. They want to know how many Californians drive off-road, for what purpose, and how often. To answer these questions, the Division has commissioned a new and expanded fuel tax study that is expected to be completed in 2004.

- **OHV Grant Program Reforms**

New regulations have been imposed that require grant recipients to meet much tougher standards for managing public lands. Funding to federal agencies for resource management has increased substantially, as has outreach to local law enforcement agencies.

As this publication notes, grant funding for conservation increased from \$2.1 million in the 1999-2000 fiscal year, to \$4.6 million in the 2000-2001 fiscal year, a 124 percent increase. Statewide, grant funding for OHV law enforcement increased from \$1.6 million in

the 1999-2000 fiscal year, to \$4.2 million in the following fiscal year, an increase of 154 percent. Grant funding to county sheriffs increased from \$161,000 in the 1999-2000 fiscal year, to \$1.6 million the next fiscal year, an 894 percent increase.

- **Strategic Planning**

The Division has launched a statewide strategic planning process to help direct the Division's land acquisition program and accommodate the future demand for backcountry access and off-highway recreation.

- **Enhanced Public Safety, Education and Outreach**

The Division has implemented a comprehensive safety, education, and outreach program that encourages safe and environmentally responsible OHV recreation.

For more information on the OHMVR Division please visit our website at [www.ohv.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov)

**MEDIA ADVISORY: Deputy Director David L. Widell is available for media interviews in connection with the publication of the report. Please call Public Information Officer Joe Rosato at (916) 324-1576 to make arrangements.**

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